

**Remarks at a Hanukkah Reception**

*December 19, 2022*

*The President.* Hello, everybody. My name is Joe Biden, and I'm Jill's husband. *[Laughter]* And you three guys have been standing there a—want to come up on the stage and sit down here with me?

Why don't you just have seat? It's easier. You can sit if you want.

*[At this point, three children came forward and sat on the stage.]*

*The President.* They're being great kids, I tell you. *[Laughter]*

*Child participant.* He gets it! *[Laughter]*

*The President.* Well, I don't know, I—well, folks, happy Hanukkah, everyone.

On behalf of Jill, Doug, and Kamala, thank you. And, Rabbi, Bronia, thank you for hanging out with me—a couple weeks ago. And Michèle and Avigaele. To all of you here, including so many friends, thank you being—for being part of this moment.

Just over 2 months ago, Jill and I hosted the first-ever High Holiday reception at the White House. It was deeply meaningful. It was something that we've always—we'll remember. And I felt—it felt what the Jewish proverb teaches: "What comes from the heart goes to the heart." And it went to our heart, for real. It's never happened before in the White House.

Tonight we're honored to mark another new tradition we're establishing tonight. And that is the lighting of what will be the first-ever permanent White House menorah. It will also be the first Jewish artifact in the entire White House collection.

You know, Jill just described it, and I echo her gratitude to the incredible White House carpenters who made it. You all didn't really—really appreciate that. But I tell you what, guys—thank you, thank you, thank you for the love you put into it.

You know, to celebrate Hanukkah, previous administrations borrowed a menorah with special significance of survival, hope, and joy. This year, we thought it was important to celebrate Hanukkah with another message of significance: permanence. Permanence. The very promise of America is that we all are created equal and deserve to be treated equally throughout our entire lives.

While we have never lived up to that promise, we've never fully walked away from that promise. It's been up to each successive generation to dedicate ourselves to delivering on that promise. That's the story of America. It's also the story of Hanukkah, a story of recapturing, restoring, and rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem, desecrated by the ancient Greeks; a timeless story—a timeless story—of miracles, of a small, courageous band of warriors fighting—fighting—for their values and their freedom to defeat one of the most historically powerful empires.

The miracle of that small jar of oil, found among the temple wreckage, it should only have lasted 1 day yet burned brightly for 8 days. Eight days. The flame of faith that burns from tragedy to persecution with a spirit of survival and resilience that endures. And it has endured.

In America, we see it in our contributions of the generations of Jewish Americans enriching every single part and aspect of American life, contribution defined by the values of equality and justice, freedom, charity, service, dignity.

The spirit of survival and resilience also endures in this menorah, built from the foundation, reclaimed and rededicated White House wood, possibly dating as—to the early 1800s, for generations past. And supposedly—you know, it's supported by a modern—polished silver cups, from today and for generations to come.

But the Talmud teaches us we cannot rely on or expect miracles; we have to earn them. Earn them. We know that task is not easy. No one knows better than this audience.

This year's Hanukkah arrival—arrives in the midst of rising emboldenment of anti-Semitism at home and, quite frankly, around the world. I recognize your fear, your hurt, your worry that this vile and venom is becoming too normal.

As your President, I want to make this clear—as my dad would say, and many of you have said: Silence is complicity. We must not remain silent. And I made no bones about it from the very beginning: I will not be silent. America will not be silent. I mean it.

Over 20 years ago, here in the White House, my dear friend Elie Wiesel—and he was a friend, became a friend—who passed away 6 years ago and we all miss—delivered a speech about, quote, the "Perils of Indifference." The "Perils of Indifference." He said, "Indifference is not a response. Indifference is not a beginning; [indifference] is an end. And therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy. . . ." Always the friend of the enemy.

Today we must all say clearly and forcefully: Anti-Semitism and all forms of hate and violence in this country can have no safe harbor in America. Period. And evil—this is not hyperbole—evil will not win. Hate will not prevail. Like this White House menorah, our commitment to the safety of the Jewish people and the vibrancy of Jewish life that's tightly woven into every fabric of America, it's permanent. Permanent.

And folks—[*applause*]*—that's why I appointed Deborah Lipstadt, the Holocaust expert—[applause]*—there you are, Deborah—a Holocaust expert, the first Ambassador-level Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. And you've got it in your heart, you've got it in your hand, and you've got the capacity to do it. God love you.

I've launched a new effort to develop a national strategy to counter the scourge of anti-Semitism and convene the first-of-its-kind White House Summit on Combating Hate-Fueled Violence. We helped secure the largest increase in Federal funding ever for the physical security of nonprofits, including synagogues and Jewish community centers. And nobody—nobody—for nobody should ever fear going to a religious service and a school or walking down the street wearing a symbol of one's faith.

Let me close with this. Just as we light one candle after another, another lesson from the Talmud is this: No matter what challenge we face, we've never stopped moving forward. Think about it. Never once have we stopped moving forward. "We must rise in our faith and holiness. Never decline."

And as we do, let us also hold on the hope, as the Jewish proverb says, ever a glimmer of light—every glimmer of life can dispel much darkness. "Even a glimmer of light," I should say. That's why, during this sacred season, I've never been more optimistic—and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—I've never been more optimistic about America—the future of America.

In all of you, I see glimpses of light—and I mean it—and I know many of you very well, especially the menorah lighters that came up here, representing three generations—three generations: a Holocaust survivor, to make sure we never forget; a heroic rabbi who I spoke to that day, who leaves no one behind—left no one behind. That's an interesting notion when you think about it, but it took a lot of courage.

An Ambassador who advocates for human rights. And the young granddaughter of the great Rabbi Abraham Heschel who marched with Dr. King for the dignity of all people and inspired all of us to get involved in the civil rights movement.

Kid, if my mom—if my dad were here, he'd look at you and, "Kid, you've got good blood." You've got good blood. No, your great-grandpop was amazing. An amazing man. He inspired my generation. My generation. That's how I got involved in public life. Not a joke. Not a joke.

And so, like each distinct candle, we come from different backgrounds, traditions, and generations, but we're bonded by the menorah and the enduring belief that, in America, we know and we love the story of a nation that depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us.

So this Hanukkah, let's celebrate the rededication—the rededication—of ourselves to the spirit of resilience, unity, and permanence. Let's remember who we are. We are the United States of America and there's nothing beyond our capacity when we decide to do it together. Not a single thing.

Happy Hanukkah, America. And God bless you all. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 7:35 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris and her husband Douglas C. Emhoff; Charlie Cytron-Walker, rabbi, Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, NC, in his former capacity as rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Colleyville, TX, who, along with three congregants, was taken hostage in the synagogue on January 15 and later escaped unharmed; author and Holocaust survivor Bronia Brandman; U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Human Rights Council Michèle Taylor; and Avigael Heschel-Aronson, granddaughter of Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady and Rabbi Cytron-Walker, who conducted the lighting of the menorah and offered a blessing.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Hanukkah reception.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Brandman, Bronia; Cytron-Walker, Charlie; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Heschel-Aronson, Avigael; Lipstadt, Deborah E.; Taylor, Michèle.

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